

FROM THE EDITOR

Moving on, but The Observer remains a part of me

I was not expecting to write this column this soon. After a bit more than 18 months as editor of The Observer, I'm returning from where I came — the East Oregonian — to be the news editor.

My stay here has been something of a blur — settling in during winter 2019-20, ready to get to know La Grande



PHIL WRIGHT
OBSERVER EDITOR

and Union County as the coronavirus hit, then changeover in our newsroom since November 2020. And just as we are at full staff and beginning to see the fruits of that, I'm heading out the door.

Yeah, it's a selfish move. But it is one I really didn't imagine myself doing. And then, I never quite imagined myself as an editor during most of my career as a reporter.

I saw more stability in being a reporter than in moving into an editor's chair. And let's face it, my people skills are what they are. I work on them, sure, but that's a constant job.

But the offer to helm The Observer newsroom came during a point of big changes in my life, and after being the public safety and courts guy at the EO for years, I was feeling weary of covering the next home fire or fatal car crash.

I talked over taking this position with people I'm close with and respect. One bit of sage advice stuck home — did I really want to keep doing what I was doing until I was done?

Nope. I didn't.

Working as The Observer editor was the hardest, most challenging job I've done. Even moving to Japan in my 20s without speaking any Japanese does not compare to this. Did I want it easier? Of course. But easier would not have been better, or at least not better for me.

I told our publisher — one of my bosses — Karrine Brogoitti that I didn't "feel" like the editor until after doing this gig for about a year. That first year was on-the-job training. I still see it that way. But I would not have even lasted that long if it were not for Karrine, and Andrew Cutler, the EOMG's regional editor and my other boss, and just about everyone else here at The Observer.

This crew did so much to help me and work with me and make me feel welcome. Devi Mathson and Kelli Craft in the front office, Dorothy Kautz, our graphics designer, and Lisa Lester Kelly and Dick Mason in the newsroom, as well as Ronald Bond, the sports editor who had to serve as the everything editor before I arrived and who was my No. 2 for months.

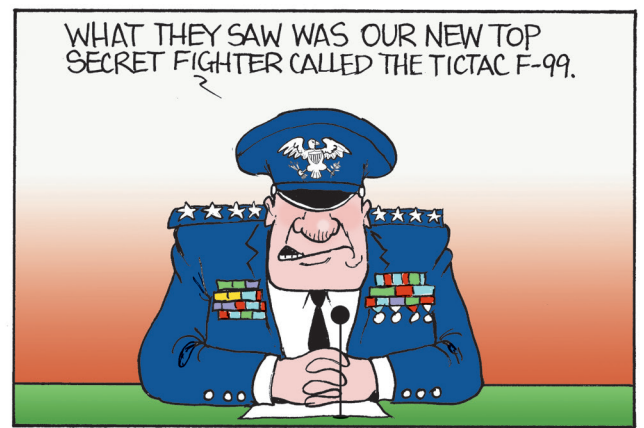
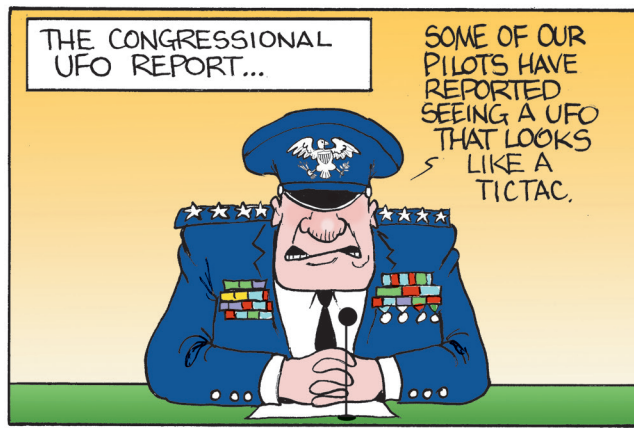
Takes a village, yes? About did for me, and I so appreciate all these villagers.

I don't believe "things happen for a reason" or some cosmic thing has plans for anyone's life. Opportunities come. You take them or not. I'm taking this not because I'm tired of being the editor here. Not even close. I feel like I was just starting to hit a stride.

Sure, I get to go back to Pendleton, where I have family and friends (haven't moved yet, though). But that also is not central to my decision.

I'm taking this because I don't know if the opportunity will come my way again, and I've grown and learned so much here that I'm keen to try my hand at a larger canvas.

While I won't be involved with The Observer, this place will be a part of me and what I do for years to come. And who knows? Other changes, another opportunity and I could be back.



EDUCATION CORNER

Asking questions is the pathway to comprehension and problem-solving



SCOTT SMITH
EDUCATOR

Understanding the world around us is the goal we want all our children to achieve. We want them to understand and explain what they see, hear and read. It should be really simple. You see it, you talk about it and you can write about it when you're older. For some reason, it just doesn't work that way for everyone. Problem-solving is a natural ability humans can accomplish. Yet, many people need a little nurturing to become a master at the skill of understanding (comprehending) and problem-solving (vocal, written or demonstration).

One method for developing problem-solving skills in children is through questioning. Questioning activates the part of the brain for problem-solving. It doesn't matter what age, whether the child is 2 or 22, using questioning strategies aids in fostering everyone's ability to problem solve. Example: Which do you eat faster with, a fork or spoon? This type of questioning asks the brain to use existing information to respond to a new problem.

Sounds simple, but it's harder than you think! Living in a fast-moving world, it sometimes feels like we have to get things done quickly. Therefore, we often tell or give the child resolutions to issues so we are able to move on. We do the problem-solving for the child, therefore, they quickly learn that in order to get the information

they need, they simply ask. Frustration hits when a child has not had practice, is asked a question and expected to respond orally or in writing, and is at a loss for what to do. Hurried adults become frustrated and often give a response something like, "Just figure it out!"

Have you provided the opportunities for your child to know how to figure things out, or have you assumed they should know? The child is showing they have not developed their problem-solving ability and, without prior practice, everyone becomes frustrated. The teaching moment is now. Use questions to help them draw their own conclusions, right or wrong, and learn from the experience.

Starting with giving the child a simple choice is best. Remember, it is OK if they choose something different than what you think is best. Many times they will, but this is where learning takes place. So if they have a choice of pop or ice cream and they choose pop, but others have ice cream, they may change their mind after everyone gets their treat. You just have to remind them that it was their choice for the pop, and next time they might be able to choose ice cream. I can almost guarantee there may be a tantrum — but remember, don't solve it for them. Don't offer to trade. Now, if they ask you to trade, they are starting to use their own problem-solving, and it becomes your choice whether to trade or not. This method works no matter the child's age.

Asking questions such as, "Do you think that's the best choice?" "Which do you think would go faster?" or "What would you do

with all that money?" forces them to trigger the thinking process and go into problem-solving. The struggle comes in guiding them with questions to draw their conclusions.

The world moves into slow motion, and the child is faced with questions. The No. 1 thing the child is fearing is making the incorrect decision. Thus, we move into the child's world of decision-making using questions, helping them make their decision or draw their own conclusions. When given more and more opportunities to allow them to nurture the skill of problem-solving, they will get quicker.

If you have a child you notice is struggling with problem-solving, choose a time to work with them. Trying to have a teaching moment when the whole family is waiting might be difficult for everyone. Seek out a time you are able to spend time with them and guide them in developing their problem-solving skills. You might consider starting with one situation each day, allowing them to make their own decision.

Start asking questions, and you'll see your child's ability to problem solve, discuss and even write about situations make remarkable growth and their ability to answer school questions as well.

Scott Smith is a Umatilla County educator with 40-plus years of experience. He taught at McNary Heights Elementary School and then for Eastern Oregon University in its teacher education program at Blue Mountain Community College. He serves on the Decoding Dyslexia Oregon board as its parent/teacher liaison.

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